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STATE FOR NEA/MAG AND IO/UNP

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [WI](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: MOROCCO: CONCERNS OVER MANHASSET AND HAPPINESS
OVER RIGHTS REPORT

REF: STATE 024302

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas T. Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Chief of Staff (CoS) Nasser Bourita told Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) and PolCouns that the Government of Morocco (GOM) was concerned over the direction of the Manhasset negotiations. Although he did not make a direct request, Bourita appeared to intimate a desire for a meeting between Foreign Minister Fassi-Fihri and NEA A/S Welch after the March round of talks. Bourita stated that the GOM did not have high hopes for the March Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Ministerial and Summit in Senegal. The rest of the meeting was devoted to the DCM's official transmittal of the Morocco and Western Sahara Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2007 to the GOM and a discussion of its contents and implications. After a cursory initial review, Bourita expressed thanks for recognizing the GOM's achievements and urged the U.S. to evaluate Morocco and the POLISARIO by the same standards. End Summary.

Concern Over Manhasset

¶2. (C) During a March 11 meeting in his office, MFA CoS Nasser Bourita told the DCM and PolCouns that the Manhasset process "is good, but is in danger" as a result of POLISARIO and Algerian obstructionism. He warned the USG not to underestimate the "capacity of the other side to misuse" the process for political purposes rather than resolution of the conflict. Without specifying the source or exact nature of the GOM's concerns, he said that Morocco would be the "last to leave the process," but that the USG and Morocco must "evaluate the dangers together." Continuing obliquely, he added, "We want to share our concerns with you."

Human Rights Happiness

¶3. (C) When presented a copy of the Morocco and Western Sahara Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, Bourita expressed gratitude for the USG's willingness to recognize Morocco's progress in human rights, and admitted that, at the same time, Morocco was "perfect" and needed to continue

working on reform. He refuted the contention that there was a different standard for human rights between Morocco proper and Western Sahara, and attributed such sentiments to "human rights nebulae" within the UN and the international NGO community that are being used as propaganda tools of the "other side," i.e., the POLISARIO and Algeria. Bourita said that inclusion of the Western Sahara report as an addendum to the Morocco report was in keeping with international legal decisions and other USG public reports regarding disputed territories, such as Kosovo. He expressed appreciation for the USG's continued participation in the annual Human Rights Dialogue, and said that it had paid dividends for both sides.

He added that, rather than being a bone of contention between the two governments, the report had become a tool for constructive engagement from which Morocco "had learned."

¶4. (C) Bourita then turned to the issue of fairness and balance in reporting in relation to the POLISARIO and Algeria, saying that talk of violations must be framed by discussion of references. Bourita said that Morocco has signed international human rights conventions and aligned its laws with international standards, in contrast with the POLISARIO. Bourita said that the notion of POLISARIO "jurisdiction" within Algeria was laughable, adding that violations in Tindouf occurred within Algerian borders and Algiers had to take responsibility for actions taken by those it harbors. "Algeria cannot cede legal responsibility for Tindouf any more than we could for Meknes," he scoffed.

Low Expectations for OIC Summit

¶5. (C) Bourita expressed a certain weary resignation about the March OIC Summit in Senegal, saying that it would produce

the "same resolutions and statements and the same lack of progress." He feared that the level of interest accompanying the OIC summit would not be met with a commensurate level of achievement. Bourita added that the debate over intellectual property and information sharing within the OIC was interesting in that "some countries" were using the discussion and mechanisms to "share information we don't want them to have." He drew a parallel between a proposal to re-write the OIC charter to allow for more internal democracy and Morocco's current state of political reform. Bourita said that some factions in both the OIC and Morocco were pressing for greater democratic changes, while others sought to use existing democratic space more effectively before opening up new avenues of political growth. "We don't know who is right yet," he said.

Comment

¶6. (C) Bourita seemed to hint at a desire for a high level meeting, perhaps between Foreign Minister Fassi-Fihri and A/S Welch, after the latest Manhasset round. Although deliberately circumspect, Bourita appeared to implicate Algeria as the cause for the current impasse and not necessarily the POLISARIO. Recent press and public statements by the GOM and surrogates, such as members of the Royal Consultative Council for the Western Sahara, show a coordinated messaging campaign focused on Algiers rather than Tindouf.

¶7. (C) Comment continued: Bourita's predictions about the OIC Summit seem to have been borne out by events in Dakar. Moroccan coverage has been generally respectful partly in response, according to an MFA contact, to the fact the GOM underwrote most of the summit's costs; and the press does not want to be overly critical of an event in which the GOM invested so much money. Response to the English versions of the Human Rights Reports, from both Government and civil society, has so far been positive and appreciative of the reports, "balance." End Comment.

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Riley